

THE I B I S.

NINTH SERIES.

No. III. JULY 1907.

XVIII.—*Notes on Birds of Tahiti and the Society Group.*

By SCOTT B. WILSON.

(Plate VIII.)

I LEFT San Francisco on March 18th, 1904, by the S.S. 'Mariposa,' and arrived at Papeete on March 30th. Papeete is the capital of the island of Tahiti, and had, at the time of my visit, a population of about five thousand people. Most of the houses are built of wood, and the picturesque aspect of the town has not yet been spoilt either by the erection of immense stores or electric tramways, as in the case of Honolulu.

On April 9th I started on a driving-tour, my first stopping-place being the hospitable abode of Mr. Tati Salman at Papara, a delightful spot about thirty miles to the south of Papeete, and possessing a great advantage over it in its much cooler climate, which is as near perfection as can be found in any part of the world. After a few days' stay there we continued our tour as far as Tautira, a beautiful district which has preserved its native appearance owing to the considerable number of grass-houses still existing, which in most districts have been replaced by frame-houses. Here Robert Louis Stevenson made a stay of three months whilst exploring the Pacific in the 'Caseo' in 1890. I returned to Papeete by

the same route to hear that a "permis spécial" to collect had been granted me by the courtesy of the acting Governor, M. Henri Cor, my request having been brought before him by the kindness of the British Consul, Mr. R. T. Symons, to whom I owe my sincerest thanks on this occasion and on many others during my residence in Tahiti. My first stay of any length was at Papara, and it was there that I first obtained specimens of several Tahitian birds, including the Oopa (*Plilopus purpuratus*). Little objection was made to my shooting specimens of this beautiful Dove on account of its destructiveness to the flowers of the vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*), which has been extensively planted in the forests. At the mouth of the stream which runs into the sea at Papara, *Ardea sacra*, *Butorides stagnatilis*, and *Totanus incanus* were fairly common.

In May I made a short trip to the north of the island, to the district of Ilaapepé, penetrating as far as Point Venus, where the monument erected by the Royal Geographical Society to Captain Cook is situated. Wild Ducks (*Anas superciliosa*) were fairly abundant there, but very few other birds were observed.

On May 27th I embarked on the Union S.S. Co.'s steamer 'Taviuni' for Rarotonga, Cook Islands, touching at two islands of the Leeward group, Huahine and Raiatea, and arriving at Avarua, the chief port of Rarotonga, on June 1st. There I was soon installed in a room of the former palace of Queen Makea, and was introduced the following day to the Administrator, Colonel Gudgeon. He expressed the opinion that there were very few species of birds left on the island; and this opinion was certainly confirmed by my non-success, as during my stay of nearly a month I observed only three or four different forms. As it only requires about four hours to make the complete circuit of the island in a carriage, it seems probable that no very large number of species ever existed there, and those which are left will, in my opinion, be extinct in a few years' time, owing to the increasing plantations of cocoanuts and bananas.

On June 22nd we re-embarked for Tahiti, after a delightful stay, taking with us some fine specimens of the Rupé (*Globicera pacifica*), a fine Pigeon, though not so handsome as the Rupé of Tahiti (*Globicera wilkesi*).

In July I explored the district of Hitiaa in the island of Tahiti, and on July 2nd was fortunate in obtaining my first specimen of *Globicera wilkesi*, after a very hard day's tramp in the interior of the island, along knife-edged ridges under a blazing sun. The Omao (*Tatare otaitiensis*) was fairly common there, as well as the Oopa (*Ptilopus purpuratus*). On a subsequent visit to the district of Hitiaa I was unsuccessful in obtaining specimens of the *Globicera*, and consider it to be a rare bird.

In August I spent a week on the island of Moorea, opposite to and in sight of Papeete, but met with little success in collecting, as *Ptilopus purpuratus* was the only bird obtained. A few years back, I was assured, a species of Parrakeet existed there, probably *Coriphilus taitianus*, but it is now apparently extinct, as is the case in the neighbouring island of Tahiti. Ten days in the month of September were passed between Vairao and Tehaupoo on Tahiti, but no new species were met with, though the visit was well repaid, as native life in this remote corner of the island was seen at its best.

In early November I left with two companions and a cook by the S.S. 'Taviuni' for Bora-Bora, spending a day at the island of Raiatea on the way. At Raiatea I chartered a small cutter, and, starting for Bora-Bora at noon, arrived there at daybreak on the following day. This is the fascinating island so well described in 'The Earl and the Doctor,' and is still unspoilt, for at the date of my visit there were only three Europeans resident on it. I was fortunate enough to obtain several specimens of *Coriphilus taitianus* in the cocoanut-trees which fringe the shore, so that my trip from Tahiti was not made in vain, uncomfortable enough though the return was, in a small gasoline schooner packed with natives and fruit. Two species of Kingfishers were common on Bora-Bora (*Halcyon veneratus*

and *Todiramphus tutus*), and I also obtained a specimen of the Oopa (*Ptilopus*), which is quite a distinct local form. On December 9th I left Papeete for Auckland on my homeward voyage. I here append a list of the species obtained by me, with a few notes on their habits.

GLOBICERA WILKESI. (Rupé.)

This magnificent Pigeon is now rare on the island of Tahiti, and during my stay there I was able to obtain but very few specimens. It inhabits the interior of the island, and is shy and difficult to shoot. In the crops of two examples which I procured on June 2nd in the district of Hitiaa was a large quantity of seeds of the Iié vine (*Freycinetia arborea*), but I was told that their chief food was the *fei* or wild plantain, though they also eat the seeds of the banyan-tree. I kept one of these birds alive in a cage in Papeete for over two weeks and fed it on bananas. The flesh is greatly esteemed by the natives, and this fact will contribute to the bird's speedy extinction.

GLOBICERA AURORÆ.

A friend was kind enough to send me several fine specimens of this Pigeon in alcohol from the island of Makatea. I deeply regret to say that he perished with his schooner in the cyclone of March of last year (1906).

PTILOPUS PURPURATUS. (Oopa.)

This lovely Dove is still fairly abundant on Tahiti and does much damage to the vanilla. I also found in the crops the fruit of the Chili pepper and various seeds, including those of the banyan-tree. On the adjacent island of Moorea I obtained several specimens, which differed in no way from those shot on Tahiti. On Raiatea and Bora-Bora, however, in the Leeward group, the form differs considerably, there being much more yellow on the under parts of the body. On these two neighbouring islands the Pigeon seems to be identical, as is the case with specimens from Tahiti and Moorea.

PTILOPUS RAROTONGENSIS.

I observed one individual of this Pigeon during my stay of nearly a month on Rarotonga, but did not obtain a specimen myself, though one preserved in alcohol, which had been shot by a native, was given to me.

GLOBICERA PACIFICA. (Rupé.)

During my visit to the island of Rarotonga I obtained several specimens. In their crops were banyan-seeds, and I was told that they feed on the wild plantain and on the banana. I fear that this bird is likely to become extinct shortly, as its flesh is highly esteemed by the natives, particularly when made into soup, while wild cats and the frequent cyclones, which destroy the forest-trees, are also contributing causes to its extinction.

APLONIS CINERASCENS. (Omao.)

Still fairly abundant on Rarotonga. It has a very sweet song, but is most stealthy in its movements, and conceals itself in a wonderful way among the leaves. Most of the specimens which I obtained were in the Kukui trees (*Alewites triloba*).

TATARE OTAITIENSIS. (Omao-Omao.)

This bird, which has a particularly sweet song, deserves to be called the Tahitian Nightingale. In certain districts it is far from rare, but owing to cats, the destruction of the forests by cultivators, and the frequently occurring cyclones already referred to, it is likely to become extinct before many years are over.

HALCYON VENERATUS. (Ruru.)

This species is fairly common, especially on the island of Bora-Bora.

TODIRAMPHUS TUTUS.

Common throughout the Tahiti group.

BUTORIDES STAGNATILIS. (Do.)

On a trip to the Lake of Vairia, an old crater in the heart

of the mountains on the island of Tahiti, I obtained two specimens of this bird. It frequents the numerous mountain-streams which are found throughout the island.

ARDEA SACRA.

I shot a fine specimen, nearly an albino, at Papara, on Tahiti.

TOTANUS INCANUS. (Ulii.)

Fairly abundant on the sea-coast of Tahiti.

ANAS SUPERCILIOSA.

Fairly abundant throughout the Tahiti group.

GYGIS ALBA.

This Tern nests in trees, and is fairly common on the island of Tahiti.

COLLOCALIA FUCIPHAGA. (Opea.)

On August 27th I saw a great number of these birds in a deep rocky ravine near Papehūi, on Tahiti. Their nests were attached to rocks over our heads, and it was impossible to reach them.

CORIPHILUS TAITIANUS. (Vinni.)

This beautiful species is, without doubt, extinct on the islands of Tahiti and Moorea. On Bora-Bora I obtained specimens in the high cocōanut-trees which fringe the shores of the island, where their shrill chirp soon betrayed them; but their quick movements and the dense foliage, added to the great height of the trees, made it difficult to shoot them.

CORIPHILUS CYANEUS, sp. nov. (Plate VIII.)

On the island of Bora-Bora I obtained a single specimen of a *Coriphilus* of a dark purple colour, and herewith append its description. I am strongly of opinion that it belongs to a distinct species, and Dr. Finsch, who has compared it with another dark-coloured specimen, apparently identical, which was brought alive on a schooner from one of the Paumotu



F. W. Frohawk, del. J. Smit, lith.

Bale & Danielsson, Ltd imp

CURIPHILUS CYANEUS.

group along with specimens of *Coriphilus taitianus*, also considers it distinct. Dr. Finsch says in a letter to me:—
 “After a careful and repeated comparison I have not the slightest doubt that the two dark blue birds are by no means young birds, but old ones.

“The blue colour is as bright as in the specimen of *C. taitianus*, also the rather stiff shafts of the feathers on the head are similar, although not quite so long. The tips of the tail-feathers are worn, as would be the case in old birds; and I cannot think that such a small bird would need two years to become mature. The few feathers tipped with dull white on the upper and lower mandible are, in my opinion, accidental, and no sign of immaturity.

“The Paumotu specimen is duller in colour and has the base of the bill lighter, on account of its having been preserved in alcohol. The two dark specimens are also smaller.”

Dr. Finsch concludes by giving the following diagnosis:—

“CORIPHILUS CYANEUS, sp. nov.

“The blue parts just the same as in *C. taitianus*, but cheeks, chin, and throat not white, but dull black.

“Bill and feet not red, but black.”

Description.—*Adult male.* Wholly of a deep rich glossy purple, excepting the chin and throat, which are duller (inclining to dusky) and blend into the upper breast; the basal half of the throat-feathers greyish white; the tail and primaries bluish, shot with purple, chiefly on outer webs; the inner webs of the secondaries blackish; the feathers of the crown reaching to the nape, linear, lanceolate and of a shining purple colour. Bill, legs, and feet black.

Dimensions.—Total length $5\frac{3}{4}$ in.; wing $4\frac{1}{4}$ in.; tail extending $\frac{1}{3}$ in. beyond wing; culmen $\frac{5}{12}$ in.; tarsus $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

N.B.—In *C. taitianus* the white on the fore-neck goes further down, and covers the upper breast also, whereas in *C. cyaneus* the black covers only the throat.